

All the King's Houses and All

By Art Buchwald

Once upon a time there was a king who ruled over a vast land from one ocean to another. Such was his power and wealth that he had a palace in the west, a palace in the east, a palace in the south and on weekends he had one in the mountains.

The King surrounded himself with a motley group of courtiers who were not above stealing, lying and cheating to keep him on the throne. Many of the King's rich subjects were forced to pay tribute to the palace in exchange for special favors and goodwill.

Although the King knew what his courtiers were doing, he shut his eyes to their behavior because being king was the most important thing in his life.

But, alas, one day the courtiers tried to take over a watergate and this was too much, even for the docile people who inhabited the land.

The King, realizing his subjects were angry, issued a proclamation saying he was appalled by the corruption in his palace, and he would find the guilty people and banish them from his court forever.

He called in the King's Prosecutor, an honest and devoted servant, and said, "I want to leave no stone unturned to find the people who have brought disgrace and shame on my kingdom."

The King's Prosecutor asked, "Sire, does that mean I may investigate everyone in the palace?"

Of course. What kind of king do you think I am that would prevent my own prosecutor from rooting out evil in the land?"

The prosecutor took the king at his word and started talking to the counselors in the palace. Each one had a different story to tell, and it was impossible for the prosecutor to know who was telling the truth.

the King's Men . . .

Capitol Punishment

He went back to the King and said, "Sure, we have heard many versions of the same story, but we have no proof as to which one is correct."

The King said angrily, "No proof? what kind of King's Prosecutor are you if you cannot produce proof?"

"We know who has the proof."

"Then drag him here and pull his toenails out."

"This is difficult, sire," the prosecutor said, staring at the King's toenails. "If we could just have your scrolls recording your conversations with your counselors . . ."

"Have you gone mad?" the King shouted. "I am the King. No one sees my scrolls. They shall go with me to my grave."

"Then," the prosecutor said, "It is impossible for me to find the guilty parties, sire."

"You fool," the King said. "My subjects are angered. If we allow corruption in the palace to go unpunished, they will try to throw me off my throne."

"But what can I do if you refuse to let me see the scrolls?"

"Let think a minute," the King said. "If I do not produce the scrolls the populace will believe I am trying to hide my guilt. But on the other hand, if I produce the scrolls they will know I'm guilty. Did any King ever face such a painful dilemma?"

"What is your decision, sire?"

"Alack, I have no choice," the King said. "Guards, take this man to the dungeon and chop off his head."

"But, sire," the poor prosecutor cried, "Why me?"

We can always get another King's Prosecutor," was the reply, "but where can the people get another king?"

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